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New Google building will be a rare starchitect-designed tower

Austin skyline to get some flair from Pelli Clarke Pelli

By **Cindy Widner** | **@CurbedAustin** | Updated Jul 20, 2019, 9:10pm CDT



Rendering of planned downtown tower to be occupied by Google | Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects / STG Design (Steelblue)

Despite (or perhaps because of) the rapidity and scale of Austin's long, recent boom—the open floodgates of tech money, the tripling down on tourism and ensuing hotel glut, and

the luxury residential towers necessary for a city suddenly full of rich young people—the skyline has remained stubbornly pedestrian.

Sure, there are exceptions ([The Independent](#), the not-even-new Frost Bank Tower), but not enough for a city that wants to be taken seriously.

Luckily, when Austin got around to redeveloping the former sites of the [Seaholm Power](#) and the Thomas C. Green Water Treatment plants (now prime downtown, lakefront real estate), it decided to go big—or at least get more creative.

The power plant was repurposed for mixed use in a way that made it contemporary but kept highly visible elements of its original Art Moderne design; the new [Central Library](#), on part of the former water treatment plant grounds, takes a completely different approach with an exciting, dynamic new build—an important building and a model of sustainability.



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Naturally, expectations for Block 185—across Shoal Creek from the library and also part of the former water-treatment plant grounds—have been, shall we say, towering. It was with surprisingly little fanfare, then, that plans for that site were unveiled at a recent city Design Commission meeting—especially because they are renderings of a 35-story office tower that could become a distinguishing part of the New Austin skyline.

It was only a couple of months ago (in a January 31 article) that the *Austin American-Statesman* confirmed that the entire building has already been [leased by Google](#), and renderings were first made public just a week ago, at the aforementioned meeting (and after the project had already broken ground).



Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects/STG Design/Trammell Crow Company

For architecture fans, it was worth the wait. The currently unnamed building is designed by internationally renowned firm Pelli Clarke Pelli, fresh off the completion of a building for another tech giant, [Salesforce Tower](#), which is now the tallest building in San Francisco. Other notable designs by the Connecticut-based firm include New York's World Financial Center complex (now called Brookfield Place) and the landmark Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Joining Pelli Clarke Pelli on the project are local firms STG Design and Campbell Landscape Architecture.



Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects/STG Design/Trammell Crow Company



Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects/STG Design/Trammell Crow Company

A building-height, curved glass wall and tapered structure allows outdoor terraces on every level, creating the overall effect (as many have noted) of a sail eternally catching a

breeze from the lake across the street.



Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects/STG Design/Trammell Crow Company



Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects/STG Design/Trammell Crow Company



Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects/STG Design/Trammell Crow Company

The tower will have 793,883 square feet of office space—enough for about 5,000 people—and will include standard tech-company perks: a fitness center and recreation areas, lounges, kitchen and dining areas, conference centers, a bar/tavern, and, surely, more. Its 1,327 parking spaces will be on lower floors, with some of it underground.

Google, which currently occupies a 29-story tower on another tract of the redevelopment site east of the new building site, has about 800 employees in Austin, according to the *Statesman* story.

While the upper floors of the new building will be occupied entirely by Google offices and parking, the structure will relate to its surroundings in a variety of ways. Retail businesses will occupy its ground floor, and its large, open lobby will provide access to the Second Street retail and entertainment district. The building also will have a plaza along Shoal Creek with bicycle and pedestrian access connecting West Cesar Chavez and West Second streets.



Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects/STG Design/Trammell Crow Company



Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects/STG Design/Trammell Crow Company



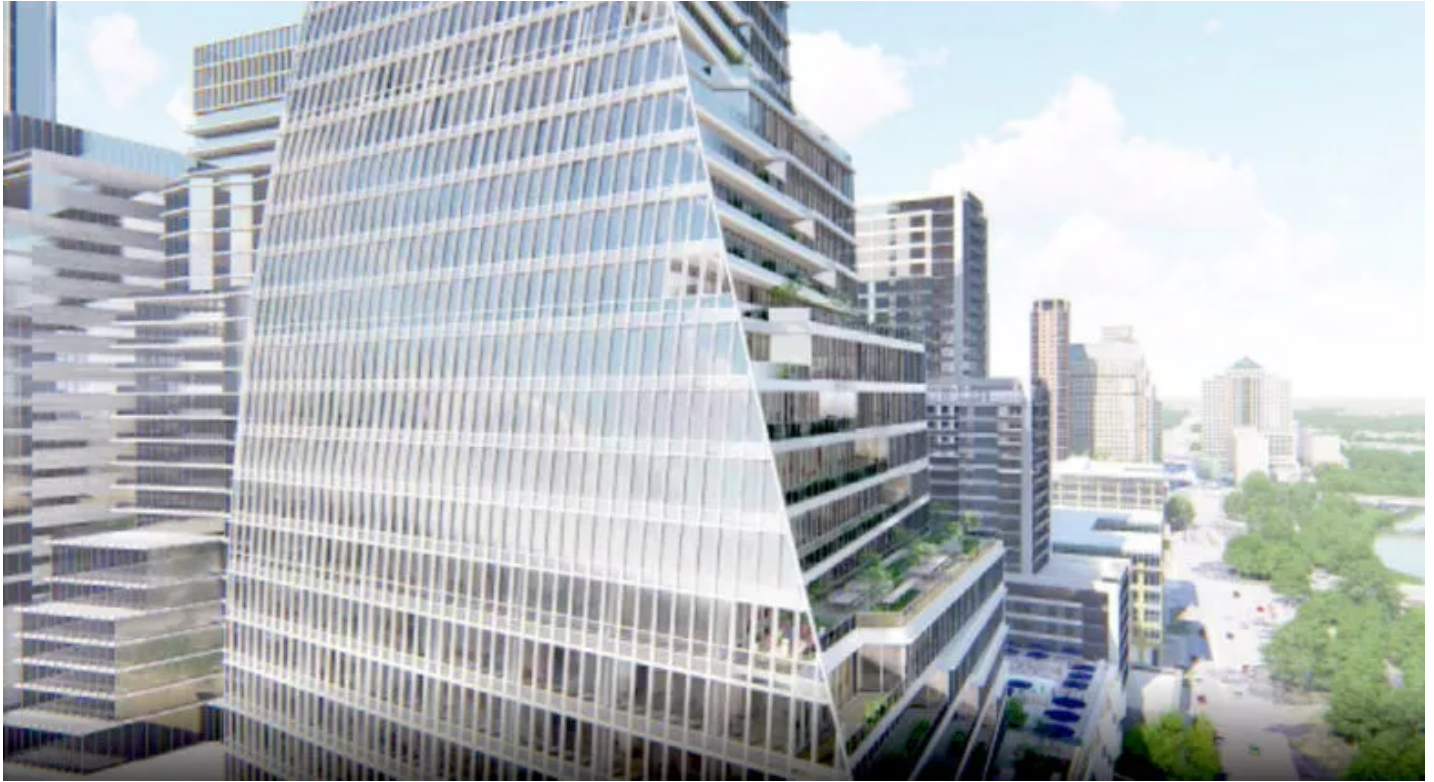
Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects/STG Design/Trammell Crow Company

Google's occupancy and Pelli Clarke Pelli's Salesforce Tower experience aren't the only tech connections at play in the new tower. According to the *Statesman* article, the project's financial backer is MSD Capital, Michael Dell's personal investment firm.

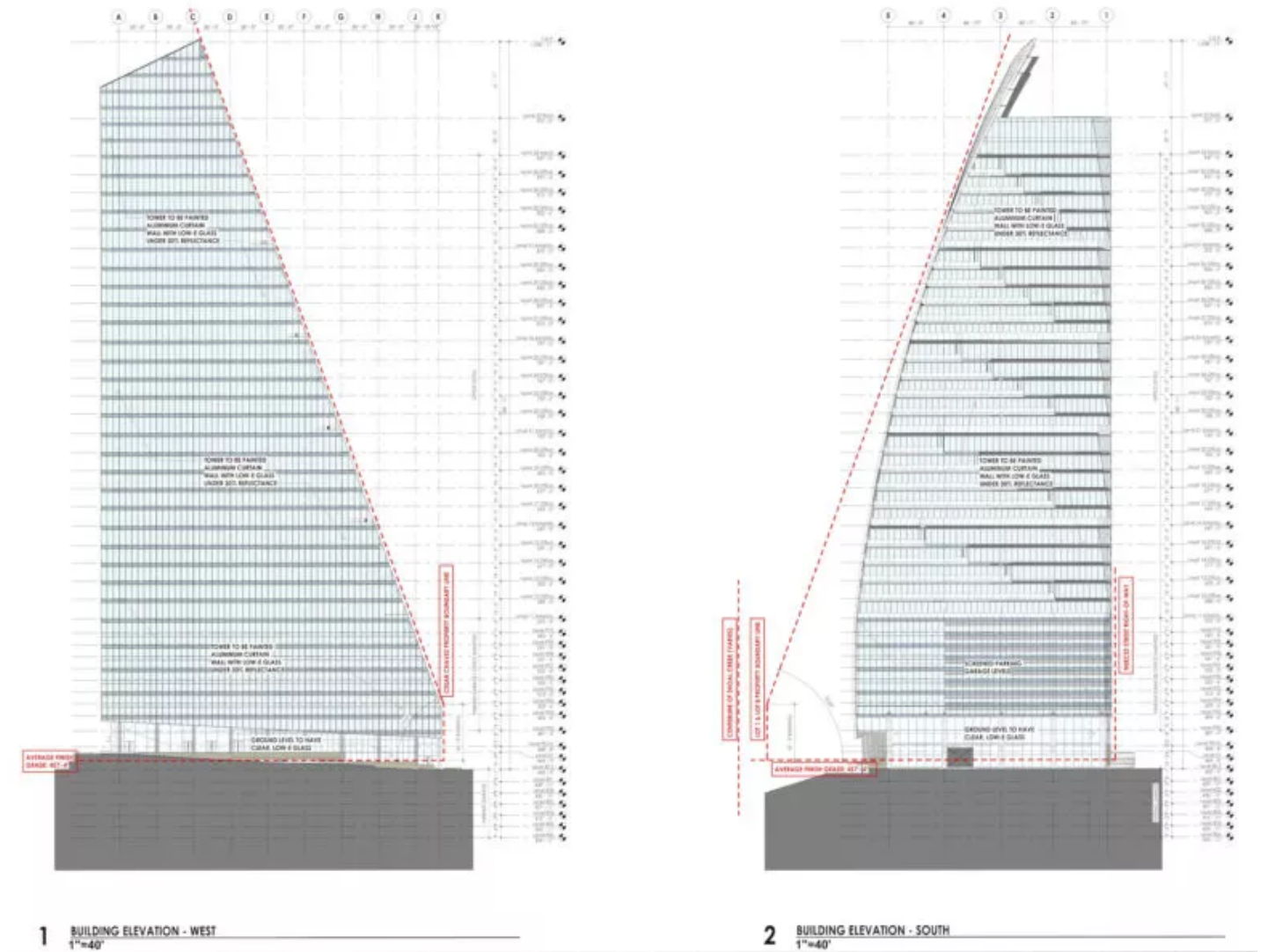
Developer Trammell Crow purchased Block 185 for about \$10.27 million in January, according to the *Statesman* story, which adds that the company and the city arrived at that amount in a 2012 master development agreement, which also supersedes some of the standard design process with the city.

The new tower will be on the last of the four parcels of the former Greenwater plant redevelopment. In addition to the building where Google currently has its offices (500

West Second Street), the Northshore apartment tower and the almost-completed Austin Proper Hotel & Residences occupy the other tracts covered in the plan.



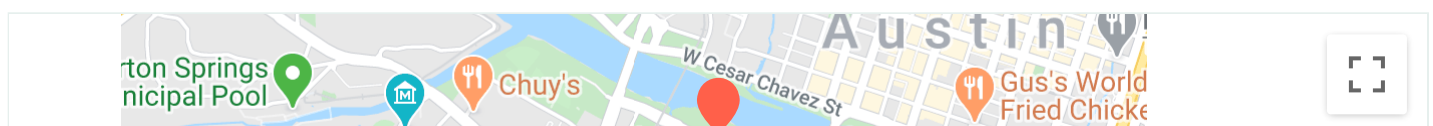
Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects/STG Design/Trammell Crow Company

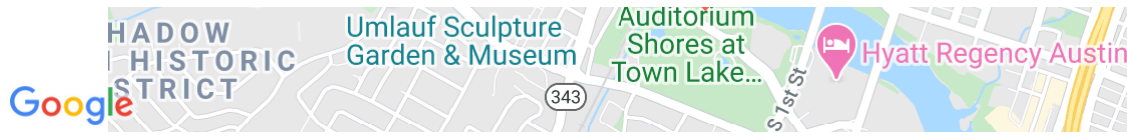


The new tower had to fit within angled setbacks on the sides that face Shoal Creek and Lady Bird Lake | Civiltude Engineers

As a March 26 Towers article explains in great, informative detail, development code necessity was likely the mother of design invention in the case of this last, important piece of the site's redevelopment puzzle.

Towers's James Rambin points out that the 589-foot building's unusual shape is no doubt due partly to two setback requirements incurred from its location between Shoal Creek and Lady Bird Lake. The resulting envelope forms a roughly pyramidal shape into which the architects and engineers had to fit the structure. In the view of many, they went above and beyond the challenge, to the benefit of Austin's changing urban landscape.





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Lady Bird Lake

Lady Bird Lake Trail, Austin, TX 78704